

I teach the English part of an interdisciplinary 9th grade American Studies class, and our students are currently studying American Imperialism at the end of the 1800s-early 1900s. We have introduced students to Rudyard Kipling's famous (infamous?) poem, "[The White Man's Burden](#)," and we have asked that they use his poem as a model for their own poem about their own "burden." I almost always do whatever assignments my students are doing, so I committed to writing a poem about my own burdens; I had many roles / important aspects of my life to choose from, but I decided to write about my role as a teacher. One of the reasons Kipling's poem is so well-known is because it was a message to America, a call to action for them to "civilize" the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. My poem, while not near as serious in tone as Kipling's, is a call to action to my colleagues to take up the parts of our job that are the most difficult. Since Kipling used a Biblical allusion in his poem (the line about Egyptian nights), I also used a Biblical quote in my poem ("Train up a child in the way he should go" is from Proverbs 22:6; this line also alludes to Hillary Rodham Clinton's idea about it taking a village to raise a child).

### The Teachers' Burden

by Tricia Scow, with thanks to Rudyard Kipling for inspiration

Teachers, you're responsible –  
For giving students wings,  
For molding them and shaping them  
To move on to bigger things.  
And you must enforce some rules  
That you'd really rather not  
Remember we're all in this together;  
Don't put your colleagues on the spot.

Teachers, you're responsible –  
Don't let them wear their hats,  
And take away their cell phones;  
They don't need to text and chit-chat.  
From their ears remove their iPods,  
Make sure they cover up their skin.  
They're too young to know what's right and wrong;  
They lack self-discipline.

Teachers, you're responsible –  
Make sure you evaluate all that work.  
After all, you did assign it.  
From your duties do not shirk.  
When the burden gets too heavy  
And your spirits start to sag  
Head on over to the Orchard  
And buy a bigger, better bag.

Teachers, you're responsible –  
Teach them to read and write  
As well as how to act their age,  
To give up being impolite.  
Their time they must learn to manage  
And events prioritize;  
They must learn to stretch their thinking  
So their power in the world intensifies.

Teachers, you're responsible –  
To parents and students you must communicate  
About the skills and knowledge  
In your class they demonstrate.  
And you must be understanding  
About the work they do not do  
Because their puppy puked on it  
Or their printer has the flu.

Teachers, you're responsible –  
When students do not care,  
You must care enough for both of you  
And try hard not to glare.  
Your students are young and too naïve  
To know just what they need.  
You must convince them and cajole them,  
You must plant that seed.

Teachers, you're responsible –  
Sometimes you must create havoc out of calm  
Or contain the raging chaos  
Without a worry or a qualm.  
"Train up a child in the way he should go";  
You're a partner with their parents  
To help them navigate the ups and downs  
Of life's ebb and flow.